

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Eyes on the Prize refers to the value of visual targets. The prize is their visual target. This activity teaches participants to use a visual target at horizon level to guide their path, keeping their eyes on the prize.

Benefits »

- ⊙ Allows participants to experience visual targets.
- ⊙ Improves lateral stability.
- ⊙ Requires participants to pay attention to their sense of balance.

Set It Up »

Put down a line (or two or three) using your widest tape (0.5 to 2.0 inches [1.0 to 5.0 centimeters]). At one or both ends, place visual targets at horizon level, such as a prize they'll win or pictures of beautiful vacation spots, tasty food treats, or favorite celebrities for participants to focus on.

How to Do It »

Start by discussing a little about visual targets: Where you place your gaze guides your path when moving. When people learn to drive, for example, they are taught to look far ahead at the middle of the road. When skiers learn to ski through the forest, they quickly learn to avoid the trees by looking at the paths between the trees—not at the trees. It's a lesson quickly learned. Where the eyes focus is where the body follows. Why not use this innate visual sense when training for balance? Visual targets also make the footwork of balance more automatic.

Let participants know that they will be invited to walk this line several times. Demonstrate for the participants how you want them to walk down the line with good posture, soft knees, and above all, eyes on the prize. Then have participants walk the line, one at a time. Their goal is to keep on the path as much as possible. On the first pass, let them work it out themselves a little at a time. Ask them

- ⊙ Where are you looking when you walk? (Most look down at the line.)
- ⊙ What might you remember about looking down from previous lessons? (See Parts of the Whole on page 92; looking down moves their center of balance closer to their toes, so they were less centered over their feet.)

Now it's time to walk the line again. During this next pass, suggest they keep their gaze on the horizon. They can look down occasionally as needed, but ask them to try their best to keep their gaze on the horizon. For those who are still uncomfortable looking at the horizon, try to convince them to sweep their vision at least a little farther up the line with each subsequent path.

- ⊙ Once participants start across the line, get them to lift their gaze to the horizon.
- ⊙ During subsequent passes across the line, use these cues.
 - Abs are braced, ribs lifted, and shoulder blades back and down.
 - Keep your eyes on the prize; it will help direct your path.
 - Can you notice how this helps with gait and balance? Is it a little easier?
 - Try walking a little faster. Do you notice you can walk faster more easily? (It's true.)
 - Experts say that a visual target makes balance more automatic. Would you agree?

Give It More Balance »

- ⦿ Add some music to give their steps a rhythm.
- ⦿ Add arm swings to give it more challenge.
- ⦿ Have participants sing, recite a poem, or count by 3s as they walk.
- ⦿ Dim the lights or have them wear sunglasses.
- ⦿ Have participants use a visual target while trying to stand still on the tandem line. This is very difficult (static balance is trickier than moving balance), but it's interesting for them to try. Provide ample balance support.
- ⦿ Try Follow the Light; it's with the vestibular activities on page 257.